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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TRIPOLI 001033

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SUBJECT: QADHAFI'S TRAVEL TO SPAIN

CLASSIFIED BY: Chris Stevens, DCM, Embassy Tripoli, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Planning for Leader Muammar al-Qadhafi's upcoming visit to Spain has been complicated by contradictory GOL requests for meetings and content. After initially saying the Leader did not want to sign bilateral agreements during his visit, the GOL has reversed course and the two sides are now scrambling to finalize language for a host of memoranda and treaties. The Libyan advance team's requirements for the Leader's lodging have prompted speculation about his health. End summary.

LACK OF CLARITY COMPLICATES PLANNING

¶2. (SBU) Spanish DCM Rafael-Maria Reig Sanchez told P/E Chief December 9 that planning for Leader Muammar al-Qadhafi's mid-December visit to Spain had been problematic in both a logistical and substantive sense. Qadhafi originally wanted to visit Spain before the recent EU-African Union Summit in Lisbon; however, that wound up not being possible for scheduling reasons on both the Libyan and Spanish sides. It is now expected that Qadhafi will travel to Spain December 15-18 for a visit comprising both personal and official elements. Sanchez noted that the GOL has been unclear and at times contradictory about whether it wishes the visit to be considered official or unofficial.

¶3. (C) Confirming press accounts, Sanchez said Qadhafi will meet with Spanish PM Zapatero December 17; King Juan Carlos is also scheduled to host a luncheon in honor of the visiting Libyan leader. Finalizing protocol arrangements has been "incredibly difficult", in part because Qadhafi does not encumber an official position or carry official title, and because the GOL's advance team -- apparently responding to shifting dictates from its principal -- continues to change its requests for meetings and content. Spain's Ambassador to Tripoli, Joaquin Perez-Villanueva, told the DCM that Qadhafi's plans to visit Seville and nearby Islamic sites in Cordoba and Grenada have prompted concern about the nature of the remarks he may deliver at historic Islamic sites.

INITIALLY COY, GOL NOW WANTS TO SIGN BEVY OF AGREEMENTS

¶4. (C) After initially indicating it did not/not want to sign bilateral agreements during the visit, the GOL indicated late last week that it wished to quickly finalize language for an education and culture agreement, a defense cooperation agreement, a bilateral legal cooperation and extradition treaty, an investment security agreement and a double taxation-exemption agreement. Sanchez expressed frustration about the GOL's "wait and hurry up" approach, noting that Spain had tried for some time to finalize several of the agreements, but to no avail. According to Sanchez, the only document for which agreement on the language had been achieved was the education and culture agreement. He noted that GOL officials, referencing the recent denouement of the Bulgarian medics' case, had been particularly insistent that a bilateral legal cooperation and extradition treaty should preclude the possibility of immediate pardon for prisoners returned to their home country. Sanchez lamented that the rush to finalize agreements for signature in time for Qadhafi's visit had precluded meaningful bilateral discussions of what the two sides' understanding of those accords would mean and how they would be implemented. "The form is more important to the GOL than the substance", he said.

LODGING REQUESTS PROMPT SPECULATION ABOUT QADHAFI'S HEALTH

¶5. (C) Sanchez noted that Qadhafi's lodging requirements were also problematic. GOL officials insisted that the Leader not be housed above the first floor of the hotel in which he will stay, saying Qadhafi refuses to ride in elevators because of security considerations. In addition, GOL minders insisted that the hotel and room in which Qadhafi will stay should feature as few stairs as possible. Sanchez said that GOL officials, when pressed, conceded that Qadhafi has difficulty physically negotiating stairs (NFI). (Note: Post notes that Qadhafi appeared to be unwell in television footage of Lisbon's

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EU-African Union Summit. His gait was unsteady and he appeared to have difficulty turning his head, forcing him to turn his entire upper torso. There have been recent, unconfirmed reports that he may have suffered a stroke. End note.)

¶6. (C) Comment: Madrid's frustration with Qadhafi's advance team and the Leader's vacillating druthers echo what we've heard from our French counterparts here regarding trip coordination for the Paris stop. The focus on securing a raft of bilateral agreements, regardless of content, is consistent with the GOL's desire for demonstrable symbols of Libya's re-integration into the international community. End comment.

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